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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [EC](#)  
SUBJECT: ECUADOR ELECTIONS, NINE MONTHS OUT

REF: A. 05 QUITO 2235  
[1](#)B. SECSTATE 18883

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: Nine months out from national congressional and presidential elections, campaign season is heating up with prospective candidates plumping for support, courting running-mates, and fueling speculation over electoral alliances. As speculation turns to the elections, the Palacio government is losing what little control it had over the national agenda and its reform agenda seems even more illusory. With major party candidates holding back until closer to the opening of the formal campaign in mid-July, the presidential field remains unclear. U.S. interests including the Manta base, the Occidental Petroleum commercial dispute and the FTA under negotiation with the GOE are all likely to provide nationalist fodder for candidates, left and right.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Elections are traditionally peaceful here, but the politicized electoral tribunal does not inspire full confidence. Under the Nethercutt amendment, direct USG assistance to the GOE is restricted. The OAS signed an agreement to provide the TSE with technical assistance on February 10. To protect the USG interest in free, fair, inclusive and transparent elections under our democracy promotion strategy (Ref A), we urge USG support for this OAS assistance. End Summary.

Pre-Candidates Multiplying  
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[1](#)3. (U) Nine parties and ten national movements have been registered by the TSE for participation in the October elections. A dozen more movements are being considered by the TSE. The formal campaign period begins with inscription of candidates in mid-July (the candidate lists close August 15), so at this point there are many presidential aspirants (declared and undeclared) but no formal candidates. Here is a brief and still partial rundown of aspirants, in rough descending order of popularity:

-- Alvaro Noboa, PRIAN (possible VP-his wife). The billionaire banana magnate benefits from his personal publicity juggernaut, despite acute lack of charisma. Electoral proposals still unclear. Leads in most polls with approximately 20%.

-- Leon Roldos (possible VPs - indigenous leader Nina Pacari, Quito councilwoman Luz Elena Coloma). Thus far has failed to galvanize a coalition of the left around his candidacy, but is still trying with the Democratic Left (ID). Difficult to

understand and uncharismatic, he has high name recognition as the brother of a reformist young president who died in office; also respected by the older generation. Supporters include group led by Quito councilman Antonio Ricaurte.

-- Rafael Correa, Alianza Pais (possible VPs - Lourdes Tiban, Manuela Gallegos). Just back from talks with Pres. Chavez in Caracas and now preparing to visit Havana, former Finance Minister Correa has an anti-FTA and economic nationalist message. Attracting support from nascent Bolivarian groups and leftist intellectuals, causing resentment from traditional parties. Supporters include former Col. Jorge Brito and anti-U.S. congressman Carlos Vallejo.

-- Ex-president Lucio Gutierrez, Patriotic Society Party (PSP). Running from behind bars. Recently charged with constitutional offenses in addition to national security offenses, possibly prolonging his incarceration pending trial and preventing an actual candidacy. Support concentrated in the less populous Amazon region.

-- Ex-president Abdala Bucaram, Ecuadorian Roldosista Party (PRE). The former ousted president, living in self-imposed exile in Panama, recently praised Correa, then, spurned, declared he will run again. The Supreme Court president recently overturned his predecessor's ruling which had cleared Bucaram of criminal charges for corruption, making any Bucaram candidacy symbolic and likely to be challenged on legal grounds.

-- Luis Villacis, Movement for Popular Democracy (MPD). Congressman from the former communist party which controls the national teachers union.

-- Eduardo Ayala Mora, Socialist Party (PS). The party is also considering an alliance with Leon Roldos.

-- Eduardo Delgado, "Common People's Movement." Though not yet announced, we are told that Delgado, the defrocked Jesuit priest and former professor, champion of the movement to put the FTA to a referendum vote, and spokesman for the "forajido" movement which ousted Gutierrez, will run. His candidacy will further split the leftist vote courted by Correa and Roldos.

-- Jaime Damerval, Coalition of Popular Forces (CFP). From Guayaquil, where he is unpopular for his actions against mayor Nebot's security augmentation efforts while serving as Gutierrez' minister of government.

-- Marco Proano Maya. Independent congressional deputy, formerly of Bucaram's PRE, claims he has been asked by a citizens movement to run for president. Supporters reportedly include liberation theologian and former bishop of Cuenca Luna Tobar.

13. (SBU) Three major parties, the Social Christians (PSC), ID and indigenous Pachakutik movement, are holding back on settling on candidates. In the PSC, congressional VP Cynthia Viteri has been touted, but suffers from her close association with party boss Febres Cordero. The ID, meanwhile, is being courted by Leon Roldos and is conducting internal polls to test the appeal of its own aspirants, including Quito mayor Paco Moncayo, ID president Guillermo Landazuri, congressional maverick Carlos Gonzalez, Pichincha prefect Ramiro Gonzalez, and congressional deputy Andres Paez. Pachakutik, the indigenous party, has declared its intention to run its own candidate, possibly Cotacachi mayor Auki Tituana, but has been hurt by the recent exit of several mestizo leaders and the Otavalo mayor, Mario Conejo, over internal disputes.

14. (SBU) Most candidates are calling for unity involving alliances of some sort, either on the left or across the political spectrum. Perverse incentives mitigate the likelihood of such alliances until after the first round of voting, since most believe it necessary to have a presidential contender in the first round to help boost the appeal of its congressional candidates. Most observers

consider a PSC-ID electoral alliance to be unlikely, but others, including Andean parliamentarian and media personality Freddy Ehlers, are promoting it behind the scenes. The political dream team of mayors Moncayo and Nebot could win the election, but is fraught with contradictions which probably rule it out.

#### Election Authorities Need Outside Help

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¶5. (SBU) Electoral tribunal (TSE) president Xavier Cazar told the Ambassador on February 6 that he had recently visited numerous provinces in Ecuador to hear private concerns/complaints over electoral logistics. The TSE is committed to addressing these concerns and correcting any that would impede smooth elections in October/November. The Ambassador encouraged further outreach to help generate public confidence in the electoral process. Cazar said the GOE/TSE was looking for as much international support as possible (from the OAS, CAPEL, and others) to do so. The TSE would also work with domestic electoral watchdogs such as USAID-supported NGO "Participacion Ciudadana," to ensure open, transparent elections.

¶6. (SBU) Cazar visited New York and Washington February 7-10 to promote the vote abroad. He hoped to raise voter registration rates of Ecuadorians residing abroad through media outreach to the Ecuadorian community. Ecuadorian consuls had recently been encouraged by the MFA to get out and register Ecuadorian voters, which could improve disappointing registration numbers. In Washington, Cazar signed an agreement with OAS SecGen Insulza pledging OAS election assistance reportedly including: updating of the voter rolls, fines for election violations, and development of a database of overseas voters. Ecuador's OAS Ambassador told the press the GOE also planned to invite the OAS to send an observer mission to Ecuador for the elections.

¶7. (SBU) Noting reports that the Venezuelan electoral body (CNE) might be providing support to the TSE the Ambassador conveyed OAS and USG concern (Ref B) about the CNE's legitimacy. Cazar said that a few CNE officials had visited in 2005, but as far as he knew, the CNE is no longer assisting the TSE.

#### Low Prospects for Electoral Reform

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¶8. (U) President Palacio sent a package of proposed electoral reform bills to Congress on February 13, proposing measures to increase internal democracy in political parties, provide fair access to the media for candidates, and to clarify rules for citizen recall votes and referenda. Six previous attempts by Palacio to press for similar political reforms were blocked by Congress and the TSE.

¶9. (SBU) Prior to the unveiling of these new reforms, the Ambassador asked Cazar which reforms he thought might prosper. Cazar, former personal lawyer to PSC leader Leon Febres Cordero, said he was not sure what reforms the government would propose, but if they consist of more than 400 pages of text as rumored, it would indicate that the government is not serious about reform. To be applied in this year's elections, any reforms must be approved by Congress and implemented by July 15, he said. Cazar expressed confidence that Congress would independently pass needed reforms to raise campaign finance limits and allocate plurinominal seats by proportional representation in time for the elections.

#### Campaign Issues

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¶10. (SBU) With political and economic instability affecting all levels of society, this election should focus on issues of economic justice, social development, and democratic renovation. Unfortunately, issues linked to external forces including the U.S. role in Ecuador and the Colombia conflict

are very likely to dominate.

¶11. (SBU) Leaders of the indigenous organization CONAIE and its sister movement, Pachakutik, have already staked their electoral fortunes on rejection of an FTA with the U.S., and on demands for nationalization of Occidental Petroleum's holdings in Ecuador. In contrast, PSC leaders have privately expressed opposition to Oxy's nationalization. Some ID leaders have done the same.

¶12. (SBU) Relations with Colombia are certain to become a campaign issue, with GOE protests over a recent border incursion stoking nationalist fires. The GOE has also raised the issue of U.S. use of the Manta air base as a chit in FTA negotiations, if only for domestic consumption, making it more likely that this U.S. interest also becomes a campaign issue, at least for the left.

#### USG Resources and Interests

¶13. (SBU) With the presidential field still in flux, no candidate stands out, and many could prove difficult to work with. Correa raises the greatest concern as a stalking-horse for Chavez, but none of the others would have much chance of lasting their mandate. Political alliances are essential not only to win the presidency, but to govern afterwards. With political stability sorely lacking here since 1997, assuring free, fair, transparent and inclusive elections is one of our paramount democracy interests. Though this will not guarantee a government we like, failure can only hurt our over-arching goal of strengthening Ecuador's fragile democracy.

¶14. (SBU) We have approximately \$884,000 available for the elections, including \$200,000 to assist the TSE directly; \$384,000 to fund civil society civic education and debates and monitor campaign spending; and \$300,000 to fund domestic observation and quick counts. NED is funding an \$80,000 indigenous participation project, and IFES is promoting (for \$300,000) participation by Afro-Ecuadorians. NDI and IRI have plans to train political parties.

¶15. (SBU) Despite this USG support, we consider direct OAS technical assistance to the TSE, both for election organization and observation, critical to ensuring clean elections. We request that the Department and USOAS encourage the OAS to prioritize Ecuador in its 2006 electoral budget planning.

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